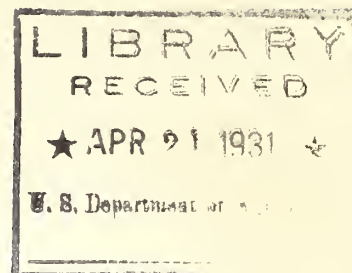


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### THE FLOWER INSECT SITUATION, 1931.

A radio talk by C. A. Weigel, Bureau of Entomology, delivered through WRC and 40 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, April 6, 1931.

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Now that spring has arrived those of you who delight in growing flowers naturally turn your thoughts to the garden. To-day I shall discuss some of the insect problems and difficulties that so often annoy flower gardeners.

We can expect that both the unusual drought which affected so much of the country last season and the mild winter just ended may have a marked influence on the abundance of some insects the coming summer. It behooves everyone of us to be ready for these pests to employ control measures that will reduce their numbers or keep them in check.

You no doubt know that many insects spend the winter in one stage or another concealed in such protected places as underneath bark, in trash, under piles of leaves, or under clods of earth. Fortunately, this habit makes it possible to combat them before they come out of hiding. In this way we can forestall the possible occurrence of a serious outbreak later on. One of the first things that you can do right now is to have a real spring cleaning of the garden so that you can dispose of all such hiding places.

Let us consider some of the insects that we can fight in this way and the reason for doing it now. First, I might mention the scale insects, including the San Jose scale, the Oyster-shell scale, the euonymus scale, and the rose scale, which are most often found in the garden on the shrubs. If you examine some of your shrubs you will find tiny specks about the size of a pinhead which encrust and cling tightly to the bark. Some of these are circular, others elongated, oystershell-like or even shaped like a terrapin. With a knife blade pry under the edge of some of these and gently turn over the protective covering. Here you find either the shrivelled body of the female and many tiny eggs or even some small young crawlers, depending on the species.

Those still in the egg stage will soon hatch and the crawlers will eventually leave the protective mother covering and start out in life for themselves and go through the same development as did the parents. So right now is a good time to deal them a death blow.

The first thing to do is to cut out all heavily encrusted limbs or twigs and burn them at once, for if they are left lying around the insects will crawl away to other plants. Then spray the plants with a light lubricating oil emulsion.

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or a miscible oil spray diluted according to the directions given on the labels. You can purchase these at most seed stores. Do not delay the spraying because now you can use a stronger and more effective solution than later when the leaves are out.

Another group of insects that you can deal with now are thrips. These tiny, elongated, yellowish to brown or blackish insects destroy the blossoms during the summer although some species confine their ravages to foliage plants alone. No doubt many of you have plucked a rose, or other beautiful flower in midsummer and on close observation have found such a bloom fairly alive with these extremely active creatures. As soon as you disturb them they scurry to some retreat between the petals or the base of the bud. Eventually they completely destroy the flowers they infest and really there is little that can be done when they have once invaded the flowers except to cut off such blooms and burn them. However, at this season of the year you can carry out certain preventive measures that will aid considerably in keeping down their numbers this summer. The eggs and over-winter stages can be killed by burning over all strips of grass close to the garden and, if practicable and permissible, you can also burn over vacant or neglected properties in your vicinity. Last but not least, keep the soil well cultivated throughout the entire spring so as to keep down weeds and other wild food plants upon which thrips can live.

Perhaps one of the most troublesome recurring problems of the gardener is the infestation of the red spider mite. This pest probably holds the record of all the inquiries that are received by the Department. It was particularly bad last summer because of the drought. Its feeding caused the leaves to turn pale and brown. Then they usually drop off. The red spider is not particular about the plants it attacks, for all come in more or less for their share of injury. If you examine the underside of leaves injured by this pest you will find numerous tiny 6 and 8 legged mites, varying in color from yellow to red, moving rapidly among a fine webbing which they spin. You will also observe numerous eggs in this webbing. With the approach of winter the adults lay eggs and seek shelter under bark and other protected places. Remove all loose bark and then follow with a thorough spraying of an oil emulsion, fishoil soap, or other contact sprays which will kill such stages as may be present. In summer frequent washing with a forcible stream of water will aid you in keeping these creatures under control.

Plant bugs are the bane of the gardener's existence. There are many species, but the tarnished plant bug is perhaps the worst offender. The full-grown bugs are a little more than one-fourth of an inch long, varying in color but usually a brassy brown marked with yellowish and black dashes. This bug has a particular fondness for dahlias and asters although many other flower plants are subject to its attack. It stings the buds directly below the base causing malformed flowers which are often referred to as being blasted. There are several means of combatting this pest during the active season, such as spraying early in the day with a nicotine solution, or beating them into pans of water covered with an oil film. But you can act now to save yourself some of that work. This bug spends the winter hiding in trash. Therefore, a general spring clean-up followed by periodic but thorough cultivation will serve to keep plant bugs in check.

Perhaps it will be well to say a few words about some of the boring insects including the iris borer, rose stem borer, and others. Of these I believe that the garden stalk borer is the one to fight the hardest. Dahlia fanciers know all too well what havoc this culprit can do although aster, cosmos, hollyhock, and other thickstemmed plants are not immune from their attack. This slender caterpillar has five dark stripes running lengthwise of the body and is about an inch long. It has the insidious habit of boring or tunnelling through the pith or heart of the stalks and stems.

Unfortunately you will not discover its injury until the plants wilt or break over and then it is often too late to do any good. On examining plants so affected you will find a small round hole in the stem. This is the entrance to the borer's tunnel. Now if you split open such stems lengthwise nine times out of ten you will catch the culprit in its haunt. You will appreciate the fact that because of its feeding habits you can not fight it by the usual spraying methods such as would be employed against insects that feed on the outside where the poison can reach them. Luckily this borer winters over in the egg on burdock, ragweed, and several other wild hosts. The eggs were laid by the parent moths late last summer. You can, therefore, attack it now by clean-up measures such as raking up all stems, roots, and plant remains. This will pay a good reward because it will forestall a possible outbreak this summer.

I could go on and tell you a lot more about many other insects that may worry you throughout the growing season, but as the time allotted me is about over I might suggest that if interested in learning more about these creatures write to the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for a copy of Farmers Bulletin 1-4-9-5 on "Insect Enemies of the Flower Garden." Or, if you have any particular difficulty along this line, write us a letter telling what the insect looks like and describing the injury that it is doing. We should then be able to tell you what the insect is and how to combat it. Perhaps you will be able to get quicker response from your own state entomologists, since they are located nearer your home. Address them at your state agricultural college.

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